



TESTIMONY on HJR 59 and HB 1025
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TEXAS

House Redistricting Committee

April 20, 2021

I am **Stephanie Swanson** testifying as a member and on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Texas **in support of HJR 121, HJR 59, and HB 1025**. We appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. Thank you for allowing us to share the League of Women Voters of Texas position on these bills.

Under our current redistricting process, legislators and political parties are meeting behind closed doors to draw election maps that keep themselves and their party in power. This closed-door process not only leads to public mistrust of our elections, but it also hijacks our democracy by creating a legislative system with little accountability. Many legislators are being elected in the primaries, where there is low voter turnout. Also, elected officials are afraid to vote against the party position out of fear of being “primaried”, meaning they are challenged in the primary by a more hard-lined candidate. This ultimately leads to discriminatory and very extreme legislation being passed.

These closed-door methods have also produced maps that discriminate against voters of color. The State of Texas has been found to have violated the Voting Rights Act or intentionally discriminated against voters of color in every redistricting cycle for the past 50 years. This past decade’s redistricting litigation was especially contentious and resulted in multiple findings of intentional discrimination that ended up costing taxpayers \$5.7 million in legal fees.

The federal district court that considered putting the State back under preclearance in 2019 asked the State to conduct a “fair and open” redistricting process during this upcoming redistricting cycle, or face the possibility of being put back under preclearance. Adopting a bipartisan redistricting commission would go a long way to creating this “fair and open” process that the federal Judge asked for and would also ensure that the rights of voters of color are protected during this upcoming redistricting cycle.

Therefore, the League does support HJR 121, HJR 59 and HB 1025 that would create a bipartisan citizens redistricting commission to draw our district maps. This legislation would reform the redistricting process so that it is conducted in an open manner with real opportunities for public dialogue and feedback.

This legislation also would ensure racial equity in the redistricting process by:

1. Including criteria that prioritizes compliance with the Voting Rights Act and the recognition of communities of interest;
2. Develops a robust public input process that equips communities to define themselves;
3. Develops a selection process that requires the Commission to reflect the State’s diversity;
4. Recognizes and accounts for lack of direct accountability of a Commission to voters by implementing robust transparency procedures and protections. Maps would be drawn at public hearings and at meetings broadcast for the public to view.

Article I Sec. 2 of our State's Constitution defines our republican form of government as, "All political power is inherent in the people, and all free governments are founded on their authority, and instituted for their benefit." Therefore, the League believes that in order for our election maps to reflect and represent our communities, Texans should have a seat at the table when the maps are drawn. We ask that you support the passage of HJR 121, HJR 59 and HB 1025.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

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